

## THE MALAY-MUSLIM RESPONSE TO CESSION OF SARAWAK TO THE BRITISH CROWN 1946-51

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### INTRODUCTION

The political and social stability of the Brooke regime in Sarawak depended on a close and enduring relationship between the Brookes and the Malay *datus*. Realizing this fact, the Brookes (in general) reaffirmed the traditional status of the local *datus*. The people of Sarawak, particularly the Malays, considered Sarawak to be an independent state and the Brooke Rajahs as their protectors. The Brookes, on the other hand, were aware that, "Sarawak belongs to the Malays, the sea Dayaks and Land Dayaks, the Kayans, the Kenyahs, Milanos, Muruts, Kedayans, Bisayah and other tribes, not to us. It is for them we labour not for ourselves."<sup>1</sup> In relation to their concept of the Rajah, the Malays looked upon Brooke as the head of their political system. Though he was not a Muslim, he had sworn to protect the Muslim faith and customs, while to the non-Muslim natives he was considered as a protector and saviour.

The Brookes depended on the Malay political elite to strengthen their power. This political elite was normally recruited into the civil service either becoming native officers or clerks. These posts were highly respected and the close-contact with the administrative gave these 'privileged Malays' some administrative experience and understanding of the workings of the government. Furthermore, during the Japanese occupation of 1941 to 1945, some changes occurred in the Malay society and in the Malay political outlook. Most of the native members of the Brooke civil service were asked, it not forced, to remain in their administrative positions to help run the Japanese-controlled government. This retention of office, coupled with quick promotion which often attended those officers who showed themselves cooperative with the Japanese, gave the local leaders and senior servants their first real opportunity of running Sarawak. In fact a Japanese military decree of 1943 emphasised "the political participation of natives in the administration of North Borneo (including Sarawak)". The Ken Sanjikai or Prefectural Advisory Council which had been authorised by the Military decree

of 1943 chose its councillors from the old elites. The Malays were represented by Datu Amar, Datu Pahlawan and Native officers Abang Openg, Tuanku Bujang and Haji Abdul Rahman. The Ibans were represented by Ong Kuan Hin and Lee Wing Thong. The councillors were supposed to advise the Japanese administration on social and political questions.

Apart from emphasising the political participation of the natives in the administration, the Japanese also encouraged the formation of communal based associations, similar to those formed in Malaya, such as local branches of the Indian Independence League, Overseas Chinese Association and the Perimpun Dayak. These associations were responsible for organising demonstrations of loyalty and cultural events to celebrate the Japanese Emperor's birthday and War Heroes'. Among the Malays the Japanese followed the Brooke style of governing the masses through the traditional elite rather than working with a group of educated Malays and the Malay National Union of Sarawak (MNUS). There is no evidence available to suggest the existence of anti-Japanese 'underground activities'. Malay affairs were the responsibility of a department which was then in charge of senior officers, Abang Openg and Tuanku Bujang.

The Japanese also sponsored the setting up of a women's association (Kaum Ibu) with representatives of the four major races, Lily Eberwein from the Malay section, Mary Ong from the Chinese, Barbara Bayang from the Ibans and Mrs. Gopal from the Indian side. They were active in raising funds for gifts to Japanese soldiers. This kind of association indirectly gave them self-confidence and encouraged them to be interested in politics.

In the Second Division, the Japanese established a kind of indirect rule through educated Ibans. In January 1942 the Japanese authority appointed Eliab Bayang as Liaison officer on Iban affairs in Simanggang. Empenit Adam became Guncho (District Officer), and Inspector Edward Brandah was promoted to Deputy Superintendent of Police at Miri. Edward Brandah later joined the Allied resistance party against the Japanese before the end of the war.

Although the Japanese occupation did not produce any radical change, the modest participation given in the administration to the natives, particularly to the educated ones, gave them self-confidence and fostered political consciousness.

Apart from giving preference to the privileged Malays in the civil service the pre-war Brooke Government also concentrated on giving the Malays education rather than the other ethnic groups. This was considered justified as the Brookes had to depend on the Malay aristocrats to perform administrative work, while the other



non-Malay natives were either regarded as 'primitive' or were not interested. Nevertheless, the education imparted to the Malays was limited to the primary level. However towards the end of the Brooke rule, the government did send some of the good students to be trained as teachers in the Sultan Idris Training College in Malaya and to the newly formed Sarawak Teachers' Training College in 1939. In spite of the fact that the education acquired by students in those colleges and the Madrasah Melayu Sarawak was only up to the lower secondary school level, the calibre of those involved was such that even the limited education was enough to stimulate an awakening among the Malays. This brought forth a feeling of oneness, of love for the country, culture and language, and a realization of Malay backwardness economically vis-a-vis the Chinese. Hence it is against this education background that the development of Malay political consciousness should be seen, though it was not envisaged by the Brookes. Quite by chance it gave birth to an autochthonous Malay intelligentsia in Sarawak who played an important role in Sarawak politics immediately after the war. This Malay intelligentsia became agents of a new revolutionary fervour in Malay life as demonstrated in their participation in the anti-cession movement from 1946-1951.

## THE CESSION

Discussions concerning the prospective takeover of the government of Sarawak from the Brooke Regime took place in London during World War II. However the idea had long been suggested by the officials of the Colonial Office who had studied and reviewed the treaty-relations between both states, and considered how to approach the situation as early as the 1920s and 1930s.

By 1945 the British Government was determined to hold not only Malays but also the Borneo territories whatever American critics might say, with or without consent of the inhabitants of the territories. They intended to continue with the policy on the constitutional future of Malaya and Borneo which had been adopted by the War Cabinet in 1944. When the Labour Government came into power in July 1945, they showed less sympathy towards the Brooke regime. They had a feeling that the regime should not be restored after the war. Besides considering the defects of the Brooke administration and the strategic position of Sarawak, the Colonial Office was influenced by the economic potential of Sarawak and Sabah. The Colonial Office felt "...that so large an area of potentially rich tropical territory should be left undeveloped, making a relatively negligible contribution to the world's wealth and enjoy-



ing few of the benefits of modern scientific progress, cannot be tolerated indefinitely...''<sup>2</sup> The transfer of power to the Colonial Office would provide more opportunities for western enterprise in Sarawak. Moreover at that time rubber and oil were essential to Britain, particularly since the granting of independence to India and Burma became an imminent possibility.

Apart from his awareness of persuasive and subtle pressure from the British Government, the Rajah himself wished to give up his responsibility for Sarawak because he had never been seriously interested in governing the country. However before the cession could materialize he made sure that his own and his family's financial position were secured. He was aware that, unlike the British North Borneo Chartered Company, Sarawak had considerable funds. At the time of cession the financial reserves of Sarawak were £ 2,750.00. Financial motives had preoccupied the Rajah's mind since the 1930s. He had sought to make financial provision for himself and his family by 'secret negotiations' to sell his autocratic powers to the Committee of Administration in 1941 for £ 2,000.00.<sup>3</sup>

Besides the reasons mentioned above, Vyner Brooke's lack of confidence in his nephew's capability to succeed him as Rajah played an important part in his decision to cede Sarawak. He said, "I have no confidence that he [Anthony] would be a good ruler. I have given him three chances to prove his worth and he has failed."<sup>4</sup>

After the civil government resumed power in Sarawak, the Rajah made plans to return there at the end of March, 1946 to revive the 1941 Constitution. In order to show the cession was implemented in a proper constitutional manner the Rajah called a meeting of the Council Negri. The meeting was held from the 15th May to 17th May, 1946, solely for the purpose of passing the Cession Bill. Although the British had formed a preliminary lobby to win native votes in the Council Negri, the majority of the native members voted against the Bill. In the second Reading on the 16th May, 18 were in favour and 16 against, with the non-European votes divided, namely 12 in favour and 13 against. In the third reading on the 17th May, 19 were in favour and 16 against; with the non-European votes being 9 in favour and 12 against; and 7 Europeans, one Eurasian and two Chinese voting in favour:

	For	Against
Native Members	9	12
Indians	-	1
Chinese	2	-
Eurasian	1	-
Europeans	7	3



Had the European votes been ignored, the Cession Bill would have been defeated. Hence the day was won for the Colonial Office by seven Europeans of whom four were heads of government departments. In the Council Negri itself no effort was made to translate speeches and thus most of the native members were unable to follow the proceedings fully. Furthermore the President of the Council was visibly biased in that he appealed to members to vote in favour of cession. On this evidence the voting was simply an attempt to legalise the transfer of power to the British Government. It is interesting to note that the Cession Bill was passed with a narrow majority of 3.

### THE ANTI-CESSION MOVEMENT IN SARAWAK

The anti-cession movement occurred in 1946-1951 in order to oppose cession of Sarawak to the British Crown. The movement was pioneered by the Malay National Union of Sarawak (MNUS). The MNUS which was formed in 1939 was known as Malay Union of Sarawak before the war. Its objectives were to encourage the Malays to cooperate with each other; to improve and encourage Malay education; to preserve the culture and to maintain the dignity of the Malays, to encourage the Malays to enter business and to spread the teaching of Islam.<sup>5</sup> The movement began in January 1946 when Vyner Brooke sent his Private Secretary, MacBryan, to Sarawak in order to secure from the Malay datu and native chiefs preliminary consent to cession. When Datu Patinggi told the members of the MNUS about the 'bribes' given by MacBryan, the MNUS called a special meeting to discuss the cession issue on 12th February, 1946. At a subsequent meeting on 27th February, 1946, Datu Amar Abang Haji Sulaiman, the president, was forced to resign because he now supported cession. He was replaced by Abang Haji Zaini, son of Datu Bentara. Abang Haji Zaini was one of the MNUS delegates who had attended the second Annual Congress of Malay Associations in Singapore in December, 1940.<sup>6</sup> In the meeting of 27th February, 1946 the supporters of cession were challenged to debate the question but no one seemed to have responded. On 12th March, 1946 MNUS sent a letter to Datu Patinggi expressing its view that,

...It is the will of the indigenous people of Sarawak that H.H. the Rajah...should be urged to retain the government of the country. If H.H. the Rajah considers himself to be old and ailing in health he should hand over the government to H.H. Tuan Muda...and if H.H. Tuan Muda cannot shoulder the responsibility on account of his health, then the title of the Rajah should be conferred upon his son Anthony Brooke...in order that [they] Brooke line should be unbroken.



The letter was signed by Abang Haji Zaini as President of the MNUS and Abang Kipli, Haji Ali, Haji Kawi and Haji Abdul Rahman as the Vice-Presidents. Most of these leaders were traditionalists and their views were reflected in the contents of the letter above. They were satisfied with sending letters of protest against cession to the British Government, Vyner Brooke and the Sarawak Government. However, the younger members of the MNUS such as Mohd. Maamon Mohd. Nor, the Treasurer, Johari Bojeng, and Suhaily Matlayer, played a vital part in organising visible anti-cession activities throughout Sarawak. They made several public denouncements of the cession.

The passing of the Cession Bill in May 1946 did not stop the anti-cessionists from continuing their protest against the colonization of Sarawak. In fact the Bill angered the natives and forced them to organize themselves to oppose cession. When Vyner announced his decision to cede Sarawak there was only one body in opposition, i.e. the MNUS, but after the passing of the Bill, Sarawak saw the growth of many anti-cession associations. Besides sub-branches of the MNUS in five divisions in Sarawak, there were many other strong organizations, such as Angkatan Semangat Anak Sarawak (ASAS), Persatuan Bumiputra Sarawak (PBS), Pergerakan Pemuda Melayu (PPM), Kesetiaan Muda Matu, Kesetiaan Melayu Simanggang, Kesetiaan Klub Dalat, Sulam Mas Seria and also the Sarawak Dayak Association (SDA) which cooperated with the MNUS in the campaign against cession in July, 1946. Despite the existence of these organizations, in many respects the MNUS became the major spokesman for the anti-cession forces. Each year during the six years of the campaign the MNUS, together with other organizations, particularly the PPM Sibul, held a peaceful demonstration against cession at which placards demonstrating sentiments such as "Natives of Five Divisions do not want colonial administration," "Down with Sarawak Colony", "Our Protest for freedom is undaunted," and "No cession, Sarawak is our blood and soul" were carried.<sup>8</sup> Anti-cession demonstrations were staged periodically to great visiting colonial officers such as C.W. Dawson, Malcolm MacDonald and the first Governor, Sir Charles Arden Clarke.<sup>9</sup>

Although almost all the anti-cessionists wished to see a restoration of the Brooke Raj in Sarawak, it was not necessarily for the same reasons. For instance in the MNUS, members were divided into two big factions. The traditional elite generally consisted of the perabangan families and the older people, whereas, the second group comprised the 'young Turks'. However, as one of the 'young Turks' wrote to Anne Bryant, sister of Anthony Brooke, 'the



inner trouble' (the internal factions and dissension) was kept between themselves only. "Though Ma'amon, Sharkawi Haji Usman, Johari Bojeng and myself are still in the official list of the Union but in reality that is only policy to show to the public as our influence seems to be popular among youngsters and oldsters as well. We are entirely deprived of any active part in the Union."<sup>10</sup>

The 'Inner Circle', as it was then named by the group, consisted of the young and active members of the MNUS<sup>11</sup> such as Mohd. Ma'amon Mohd. Nor, the first Malay to pass the School certificate Examination (Junior) in 1932. He won a scholarship to Serdang Agriculture College in Malaya but his award was given instead to one of the perabangan class. He worked in the Department of Posts and Telegraph for two and half years, then started an evening school and a small business. During the Japanese occupation he worked as a farmer in the padi-fields. He was one of the active members of the MNUS and was influential and popular among the younger group. To Suhaily, "Ma'amon is a sincere and light-hearted gentleman not willing to crave for rank and name...he [was prepared] to accept anything in order to fulfill the wish of the people who trusted him and to prove his words, to sacrifice his property and life for the welfare of people, the Rajah and the country."<sup>12</sup> After sacrificing all his property for the anti-cession cause, he went to Brunei to work for Shell Company in 1948 and remained there for some years. Although he did not give up the struggle, he ceased to be active. In 1946 he was appointed as the Private Secretary to Datu Patinggi.

Another active member of the MNUS was Johari Bojeng, who was a grandson in-law of Datu Patinggi. He was trained as a Malay school teacher at the Sarawak Teachers Training College, Kuching. He was an influential anti-cessionist and active in persuading fellow teachers to resign.<sup>13</sup> Another activist, Su'aut Tahir, was the son of a government servant. He was educated at the Maderasah Melayu Sarawak and St. Thomas' School. He joined the Medical Department as a dresser in 1929. He established the Persatuan Melayu Simanggang while working as a Divisional Medical Officer in Simanggang in 1946 before returning to Kuching. He then became the Secretary General of the Barisan Pemuda Sarawak in 1947.<sup>14</sup>

Suhaily Matlayier was not a government employee but worked with the Sarawak Steamship Company. He was a very active anti-cessionist and, together with Mohd. Ma'amon and Robert Jitam, wrote frequently to Anne Bryant concerning the anti-cession campaign and anti-cession movement. Another participant, Sharkawi Haji Osman, was educated in the Arabic School (Al-Junid) in



Singapore. While in Singapore he had the opportunity to mix with other Malay nationalists such as Dr. Burhanuddin Al-Helmy. He was a talented orator and always inspired the Malays with his fiery lectures on nationalism. He worked as a teacher in the Arabic School al-Madrasatul Islamiah in Kuching in 1940-1942 and 1946. Among his students were Datuk Haji Abdul Kadir Hassan, President of the Majlis Islam Sarawak, and Haji Anis Abod, the Pilgrimage fund Officer.<sup>15</sup>

The 'Inner Circle' formed the most active force within the MNUS. This group was inspired by Hj. Sharkawi Hj. Osman and his brother, Hj. Mohd. Shazali, who often gave fiery talks on politics and nationalism.<sup>16</sup> Most of its members viewed the return of the Brookes under the limitation of the 1941 Constitution as providing an interim period which would allow for the development of national independence in which a multi-racial political power would be shared with the Ibans. They thus worked together as allies with the educated Ibans in the Sarawak Dayak Association (SDA) to protest against the cession as an encroachment of British bureaucratic imperialism and to resist the Chinese predominance in economic life. In the meantime, for the sake of party unity, the 'Inner Circle' was prepared to cooperate with members of the traditional elite and would probably have supported the idea of Datu Patinggi or one of his grandsons becoming the Rajah in place of the Brookes.

The first clash with the traditional elite happened when the 'Inner Circle' proposed the formation of a "United Sarawak National Organization in July 1946." The organization was regarded as an indigenous anti-cession front.<sup>17</sup> While its proposers tactfully stressed its usefulness in fund-raising and creating a greater sense of anti-cession solidarity, its real aims were those of a political party committed not just to the restoration of the Brookes but to educational and social change. However, the more conservative members of the MNUS, notably Haji Abdul Rahman and Abang Haji Zaini, resented this initiative. The other members of this group were Haji Bolhassan Haji Daud, Haji Kaur b. Said, Haji Alib Hosen, Haji Busrah Osman, Haji Yaman b. Haji Drahman and Johari Anang.<sup>18</sup> Haji Abdul Rahman was a powerful man in the MNUS although he was only a Vice-President. He was a businessman and owned a bookshop before the 1941-45 war. Johari Anang was a self-educated man and became an English teacher and part-time trader. He was the Secretary General of the MNUS from its establishment until his death in 1965. He was also the editor of the Japanese paper *Kuching Shimbun* during the Japanese occupation.



As a reporter, he was one of the editors who formed the *Fajar Sarawak* in 1930. He was also one of the chief contributors to *Fajar Sarawak* and *Utusan Sarawak* (1949).

The moderate or conservative group was satisfied with sending petition letters and telegrams and was not really interested in a broadly based political movement with close Iban cooperation. The restoration of Brooke rule meant for them a return to the *satus quo ante* in which they had occupied the top positions of power and prestige in Sarawak. It was suggested that if the Datu Patinggi had agreed to cession they would almost certainly have gone with him in order to enjoy the rewards which the Colonial government would have given them, such as that enjoyed by Abang Haji Mustapha when he was promoted to Datu Bandar in 1946. Others in the MNUS like Abang Haji Zaini and Abang Bolhassan, seem to have taken the view that the perabangan provided leadership which was to be accepted without question by the Malays and Ibans. They felt a little embarrassed about demonstrations, carrying posters and public speeches, preferring to adopt a fundamentally constitutionalist approach, involving the political wills of the first and second Rajahs, the third Rajah's accession oath, the Atlantic Charter and the resolutions of the San Francisco Conference on the rights of small nations.<sup>19</sup> With this kind of attitude the conservative leaders were not prepared to cooperate with the Sarawak Dayak Association and the plan envisaged by the 'Inner Circle' was subsequently dropped.

Most of the younger members of the MNUS were Malay school teachers and government servants. They came from non-aristocratic backgrounds. As educated members they rebelled against the undemocratic way in which the MNUS was run and felt that they had more in common politically with such people as Robert Jitam, an Iban from Saribas. Robert Jitam was educated in an Anglican missionary School (St. Thomas) in Kuching and worked with the Controller of Rubber, Kuching. He was one of the founders of SDA and active in the anti-cession movement. He was very close with the members of the 'Inner Circle'.

Although Sarawak at that time did not have its own newspapers, the 'Inner Circle' had the opportunity of reading Malay language newspapers and magazines from Malaya as well as Indonesia.<sup>20</sup> By reading Malay newspapers such as the *Utusan Melayu* they were aware of what was happening in Malaya and Indonesia. In particular, the campaigns against the Malayan union scheme in Malaya had an important effect on their struggle against cession in Sarawak. Events in Indonesia also influenced them for



many Sarawak Malays had geographical links and family ties in Sambas and Pontianak. For instance, Haji Sharkawi's mother came originally from Sambas. According to the Colonial Government reports, however, by early 1947 the increasing Indonesian influence was coming from Singapore and not Pontianak.<sup>21</sup> Although members of the MNUS began to make visits to Singapore in February 1947, there is no clear evidence that the anti-cessionists were associated either with the Singapore-based Indonesian association or the Gerakan Angkatan Muda (GERAM). GERAM was interested in the anti-cession movement and sent representatives, including Abdullah Zawawi Hamzah and Abdul Samad Ismail to contact its leaders in Singapore.<sup>22</sup> When the United Sarawak National Association (USNA) was formed by the ex-Secretary of Sibu young Malay association, Abang Kipli Haji Othman, the President of the Singapore branch of the Malay Nationalist Party (MNP) Taha Kalu advised USNA to affiliate with the MNP in Singapore. The idea was rejected, probably due to Anthony Brooke's influence, as at the time of USNA's formation in early 1947, Anthony was still in Singapore to publicise the activities of the anti-cession movement. USNA members included Sarawak Malays and Ibans who were working in Singapore and Malaya. Since USNA did not have contact with the Indonesian association and the MNP in Singapore, it remained isolated.

Nevertheless the anti-cessionists still had information about other nationalist movements via *Utusan Melayu* which was widely read by the Malays in Sarawak. *Utusan* gave a full account of the Malayan Union plan and was sympathetic to Anthony Brooke and the anti-cession movement. One of its reporters, Mafus Hamid, spent the early part of 1947 in Sarawak.<sup>23</sup> Accompanied by Johari Bojeng, Edham Bojeng and Nor Haji Hassan, Mafus was taken around kampongs in Kuching in order that he could himself witness the mood of the people who were indicating their stand by displaying the Sarawak flag (instead of the Union Jack) and posters against cession. They were followed by Haij Abdul Rahim Tahir, a "British Spy" from the Public Relations Office of the Malayan Union. According to Ma'amon, Haji Abdul Rahim was sent by the British Government in order to secretly assess the strength of the union between SDA and PMS. He admitted this to Sharkawi as he stayed with Sharkawi's brother.<sup>24</sup> On the 5th February Haji Abdul Rahim had a long discussion with Ma'amon and Sharkawi. From the discussion they "presumed that the British government intends to cut off H.H's [Rajah Muda] contact with the indigenous people in order to force him to deal directly with the British Government."<sup>25</sup>



The struggle for influence in the leadership of the MNUS could be seen when early in January, 1947, the conservative leadership was successful in bringing a number of more moderate Malays into the MNUS leadership, including one of Haji Abdul Rahman's relatives. The struggle was mentioned by some of the younger members of MNUS in their correspondence with Anthony Brooke's sister, Anne Bryant. One of the members, for instance, wrote, "...we are entirely deprived of any active part in the Union for the conservatives felt confident that cession must be revoked and they would reap all the harvest."<sup>26</sup> When a meeting of the MNUS on 22nd January, 1947 elected Mohd. Ma'amon Mohd Nor to act as one of the MNUS delegates to discuss the anti-cession movement's tactics with Anthony Brooke in Singapore, Haji Abdul Rahman overruled the vote by influencing the President, Abang Haji Zaini, and insisted that his own nephew, Edham Bojeng, should go instead. Unfortunately Edham Bojeng was no better than Ma'amon. He possessed little influence, and most of the public seemed to dislike him. Consequently those who were dissatisfied with the decision asked Mohd. Nor and Robert Jitam from the SDA to go to Singapore as members of the 'Inner Circle' instead of the MNUS representatives. However, as one of the members of the 'Inner Circle' put it, Mohd. Nor was not willing to go as being a Malay is representing the SDA could be misinterpreted.<sup>7</sup> However, because Robert Jitam threatened that he would also not attend the meeting if Mohd. Nor did not, the latter was forced to go.

Subsequently, at the MNUS general meeting on 29th January, 1947, the 'Inner Circle' once again asked for their MNUS Action Group to be affiliated with the MNUS. The suggestion was rejected by Haji Abdul Rahman. The meeting was attended by 83 school teachers, students and government servants representing about 1,500 young Malays and Ibans in the Kuching district. The meeting decided to form the MNUS action group or Jasa which was to be a "real democratic body" under the MNUS aegis. Its objects were broader than those of the MNUS resembling those of the USNA (United Sarawak National Association) which had been proposed earlier. The USNA was proposed in July 1946 with the idea of broadening the aims of the Union from being merely a Malay political movement to that of an organization for all the natives. It envisaged as its objectives not only the restoration of the Brookes but also educational and social change. But the idea was opposed by the conservative leaders and its draft constitution was rejected by the Registrar of Societies. The JASA's Office bearers (with the exception of one SDA member) were all from the MNUS 'Inner Circle'.<sup>28</sup>



Since the conservative members in the leadership were not sympathetic to the younger group's ideas, the group had no alternative but to establish Barisan Pemuda Sarawak (BPS).

The BPS, as the name suggested, was an organization of the young. They regarded the MNUS as the older man's association, conservative, passive and distrustful of the aspirations of the young.<sup>29</sup> As early as May 1947 Robert Jitam informed Anne Bryant that, "A new body or Association is in the making in Kuching now...The Malay members of the 'Inner Circle' comprise most of the tentative officials...that association was planned into being to offset the very autocratic steps taken by officials of the MNUS who had stifled the wishes of the young members and youths and ridiculed their suggestion on the strength of their age."<sup>30</sup>

Unlike the MNUS which opened its membership to pure Malays only, the BPS was open to indigenous youth 'irrespective of race and religion' and designed to develop the social, cultural, economic and political welfare of the native.<sup>31</sup> Hence at the inaugural meeting of BPS in June 1947, among the committee members selected were Merican Salleh (Indian Muslim), Tuanku Bujang (Arab origin) and Robert Jitam (Dayak-Iban). The former members of the 'Inner Circle' of the MNUS Mohd. Ma'amon Mohd. Nor, Sharkawi and Johari Bojeng were elected as Vice-presidents, Haji Suaut Tahir as General Secretary and Suhaily Matlayeir as Chairman of political affairs of the BPS. Nevertheless in order to maintain the link with the traditional elite, the 'Inner Circle' had to take Abang Haji Kassim as the President, 'to replace his grandfather's (Datu Patinggi) fighting post.'<sup>32</sup> It is interesting to note that Abang Kassim was mentioned as a double agent, playing a role as a British colonial 'spy' as well as holding an essential post in the BPS and being 'active' in the anti-cession movement.<sup>33</sup>

As a propagating body, the BPS organized discussion sessions for members and non-members which were known as 'Pustaka'. These were held once every fortnight. In the 'Pustaka' they normally held talks and debated either in Malay or English on politics, culture, religion and literature. Among the speakers were Sharkawi who was appointed Chairman of 'Pustaka' and Haji Johari Bojeng who was appointed Vice-Chairman. The 'Pustaka' was considered to be 'a vital organ' of the Union for information and propaganda. It succeeded in "instilling" patriotic sentiments.<sup>34</sup> In one of its important activities the BPS launched a campaign to 'convert' the important 'bribed' state councillors to the anti-cession side. Its first victory was in respect of the Dato Menteri. He was persuaded in early June to visit Anthony Brooke in Singapore. Also



on the list for conversion were Datu Amar, Datu Hakim and mufti Haji Nawawi, to be followed by Datu Pahlawan, Abang Haji Abdul Rahim and other members of the Council Negri whom Mohd. Nor described as being alarmed by the rumour that Anthony Brooke's wife, Kathleen, would visit Sarawak at the end of June. Mohd. Nor believed that since the formation of the BPS, the MNUS had lost its more active members and even the women's section came to cooperate with BPS.<sup>35</sup> The BPS claimed to have 3,000 active members and 2,000 more supporters in the First Division.

The first duty of BPS was to help mark the first anniversary of annexation by the British government. Hence on 28th June, 1947, the BPS convened a Sarawak National Conference at Darul Kurnia (Datu Patinggi's house). The conference was attended by 40 delegates. The attendance showed how the anti-cession movement had aroused Malay support in widely dispersed parts of Sarawak. In addition to the representatives of MNUS, BPS and SDA there were representatives of Kaum Ibu (women section), Angkatan Semangat Anak Sarawak, Persatuan Bumiputra Sarawak, Persatuan Melayu Miri, Persatuan Melayu Limbang, Kesatuan kaum Muda Matu, Perhimpunan Kebajikan Baram, Kesatuan Klub Dalat, Sulam Mas Seria, Pergerakan Pemuda Melayu Sibul, Kaum Ibu Sibul and USNA.<sup>36</sup> By 1st July, 1947 the first anniversary of annexation, the anti-cession movement was reaching its high peak. Early that morning members of sixteen different anti-cession organizations assembled in the grounds of Darul Kurnia and later marched out four abreast behind their own brass band carrying Sarawak flags of all sizes, as well as banners and posters of which the slogan 'we do not want cession' was prominent. They followed the prescribed route through the kampung area towards the centre of Kuching. As they passed the Brooke Memorial outside the Court House, flags were raised and slogans shouted in unison. The *Sarawak Tribune* declared, "it is only such an occurrence like this that points out to us just how far the country has developed and progressed in the march of time."<sup>37</sup> However, the paper added it was regrettable that the cession issue had thrown the people of Sarawak into two opposing camps bound to clash in opinion in all instances.<sup>38</sup>

In the campaigns to win Dayak support for the anti-cession movement, the women's section (Kaum Ibu) played an important role. Led by Cikgu Lily Eberwein, its President, the Kaum Ibu carried out its campaigns from one long house to another by walking or by boat. Anthony Brooke's wife, Kathleen, who visited Sarawak in July, 1947 joined in helping the Kaum Ibu members. Haji Suaut Tahir, the Secretary General of BPS and other MNUS members also



accompanied them on their campaigns. The people, particularly the Kaum Ibu members outside Kuching, warmly welcomed their tours.

The Kaum Ibu was formed on the 16th March, 1947 with 1,000 women members and branches in Sibü and Kuching. The leadership was dominated by two school teachers who had resigned from government service over Circular No. 9/46. The Chairman of Kaum Ibu, Lily Eberwein,<sup>39</sup> was a former Headmistress of the Permaisuri Malay Girls' School, and the Secretary was her former student and colleague, Ajibah Abol.<sup>40</sup> The emergence of the women as a political force had astonished everyone, including the British officials. Never before had the women done anything like making public speeches, carrying banners and conducting political gatherings. Together with the men they attended the political rallies. Commenting on this distinctive and historical event, the editor of the *Sarawak Tribune* described the Kaum Ibu meeting as 'History in the Making'. The Editor was impressed by the eloquence of the speakers, whose subjects ranged from Malay nationalist movements and Sarawak History to the backwardness of women in Sarawak and their demand for their rights. Their objectives were to give all possible help to their male partners, to share the responsibility with them and to sacrifice anything to safeguard their rights.

The Colonial Government in Sarawak curbed the activities of the local anti-cessionists by issuing its noted Circular No. 9 which required that all civil servants in its establishment sign a circular expressing their loyalty to the British Crown. The Circular emphasised that, "any government servant who associated himself with any activity designed to keep open the question of cession or commits any act of disloyalty to government will render himself liable to instant dismissal."<sup>41</sup> On receiving the circular the younger members of MNUS called a meeting of Malay government servants at Darul Kurnia, advising them not to sign any such Circular.<sup>42</sup> They were confident that 80 percent of all Malay government servants would resign rather than give up their birth rights and independence.<sup>43</sup> Although news about the circular was leaked on 11 December 1946 through Dollah bin Jair of the Printing Office, when it was officially released it still came as a tremendous shock to most Malays.<sup>44</sup> Therefore they now became aware that the government would take exceptional means to crush their activities.

After persuading their members to refuse acknowledgement of the Circular and to consider bringing the administration to a standstill by resigning until it was withdrawn, the MNUS and PPM Sibü began organizing a campaign to obtain as many signatures as possible to protest in Kuching and Sibü against the government's



Circular No. 9. However support was not that easily obtained. Meanwhile, one of those who had resigned suggested the taking of a group photograph of all who had resigned. It was a rather brave gesture on the part of these resigners as they had to bear such suffering because of their resignation. However Haji Sua'ut, the man who proposed the taking of a group photograph, speaking on behalf of the resigners stated,

I can assure you that they will stand to the end and will suffer whatever happens to fight for the restoration of our independence. Some of them told me that they would even lay down their life if necessary for the sake of their people and country, for peace and freedom... If Britain's wish for us is merely to bring us back to normal conditions and to raise the standard of economical, educational and other affairs, can't she do it without expanding her empire as far as our border?<sup>45</sup>

The Circular seemed like an ultimatum to the anti-cessionists. As a result, a total of 338 officers, of whom three were non-Malays, tendered their resignations rather than sign a loyalty oath to the Colonial Government by 1st April, 1947. Most of them were Malay school teachers, thus causing the closure of one-third of all government Malay schools.

The Circular was issued with the full backing of Governor Clarke. He was quite impatient with the anti-cessionist movement and was determined, to make cession was not likely to be revoked.<sup>46</sup> He charged that most of the anti-cession leaders were former pro-Japanese collaborators. As a colonial officer from Africa he was ignorant of the situation in Southeast Asia. Commenting on Arden Clarke's appointment, Dawson, who felt bitter about not being chosen Governor, wrote,

It is bad policy. What this country wants now is to be left alone. They begin to know me. They have to have Malcolm MacDonald (twice). Now another new face. I suspect it is done so suddenly in order to prevent me from becoming too much a person grata and so more difficult for the next man. But what chicanery after all I have done! feathers in the hat from Nigeria! (Not even knowing Malay or local dancing 'adat').<sup>47</sup>

It was only when it became apparent that there was not to be an orgy of witch-hunting by the British that the confidence of the anti-cessionists returned and they started to organize large-scale opposition. Meantime, Clarke felt confident that his action was supported by the British Government. Departmental heads were instructed to discourage resignations. Disaffected government servants were indirectly told that if they resigned they would lose their bonus payments and the government's contribution to their superannuation.



On seeing placards and posters protesting against cession displayed to mark his appointment, Clarke immediately took action by ordering the police to destroy those placards in the Kampong at night. When the placards were put up again by the MNUS members early every morning, a party of about 200 armed police, most of them from out-station, were finally brought in to destroy all the posters along the Datus Road on 2 November, 1946.<sup>48</sup> In fact on his arrival in Kuching Clarke was welcomed by a letter protesting against cession which was signed by Datu Patinggi and Abang Haji Zaini as President of MNUS.<sup>49</sup> Before touring the up-country he was told by his European advisers that the anti-cession feeling was only limited to one or two kampongs in Kuching. But when he arrived in Sibu a week after installation he was welcomed with anti-cession placards displayed by the Pergerakan Pemuda Malay PPM (Malay Youth Movement).<sup>50</sup> A similar welcome was also received in Miri. In fact, there was a boycott by the Malays. On the next day the Governor summoned all the local headmen to tell them that the cession question was settled. Nevertheless, he asked Datu Tuanku Mohammed, the Native Officer, the feelings of the people in Miri. The Datu replied that Malays, Ibans and Kedayans all objected to cession and would not be silenced. The President of the Malay Union Miri asked the *Sarawak Tribune* to publish Miri's view. The letter was signed by the headmen of Sibuti, Baram, Limbang and Lawas.<sup>51</sup> On 14 November they held a meeting at which it was decided to send delegates to Kuching to await Anthony Brooke's arrival and to arrange a reception for him when he came to Miri.

Nevertheless due to Circular No. 9 it could be seen at this juncture that the anti-cessionists were under pressure from the government. Thus they needed advice and moral support. When the MNUS, SDA and PPM sent their representatives to meet Anthony Brooke in Singapore in February 1947 they were encouraged to withdraw all resignations. However, the representatives stuck to their decision, though this inevitably entailed the loss of jobs and other personal sacrifices.<sup>52</sup> In fact the visit to Singapore strengthened their determination to resign. At the same time they began to be suspicious of Anthony Brooke.<sup>53</sup>

On returning to Sarawak the delegates called a meeting with more than 50 of the resigning government servants. In the meeting they decided that those resigning should not take back their letters of resignations; that the government schools should be boycotted after 1st April; that a religious and social boycott of pro-cessionists should continue until they surrendered and that non-establishment



government staff should cease to work on 1st April in protest against the Circular.<sup>54</sup> Together with Robert Jitam and 50 resigners, Mohd. Nor prepared these resolution. It may be observed that at this meeting the three delegates of MNUS, Abang Haji Zaini, Abang Bol Hassan and Edham Bojeng, did not assist in the formulation of the resolutions.

Apart from the resignation of the 338 civil servants, all 56 students of the Sarawak Malay Teachers' Training College stopped their studies in protest against the Circular.<sup>55</sup> Subsequently a meeting was held at Darul Kurnia. Among other things discussed was the possible pooling of one third of the resigners' bonus payments and superannuation to set up a \$50,000 co-operative company.<sup>56</sup> Thus it was decided not to hold any anti-government demonstration until the money had been actually paid by the government.<sup>57</sup> The Circular really tested the strength of the anti-cessionists. Those who resigned really made great sacrifices for the sake of their struggle and political commitments considering the difficulty of finding any employment besides government service in a country which was still underdeveloped. "By taking this step...we sacrifice our means of living and worldly happiness in order to show that we are determined to protest the cession of our country as a Crown Colony and to defend its Independence under the Rajah Brooke dynasty."<sup>58</sup> The difficulties and the sufferings which the resigners faced were also admitted by a number of Malay school teachers, such as Abang Anuar, Johari Bojeng and Osman Zainuddin.<sup>59</sup>

Those who resigned, especially the teachers, set up their own schools called the 'Sekolah Rakyat'. Four of these schools were opened in Kuching and one in Sibul. The schools in Kuching included one for girls which was opened by Cikgu Lily Eberwein, but this was closed after a few months because of lack of funds. The other two schools set up in Kuching were at Jalan Haji Bol Hassan and Kampong Tupang.<sup>60</sup> The teachers opened these schools because very few Malay schools were available. When most of the teachers resigned and 22 government Malay schools had to be closed, the Malay children did not have places in other schools. Thus in order to help their children they opened their own schools. Some of the schools were able to survive through contributions by the local community, which sometimes gave concerts to raise funds.<sup>61</sup> In addition, the teachers serving in them were prepared to do without wages, but some of them received a token as little as \$1.80 a month. This was typical of the sacrifices the anti-cessionists were ready to make rather than compromise their ideals.



## PERGERAKAN PEMUDA MELAYU (PPM — MALAY YOUTH MOVEMENT) SIBU

The PPM was set up in mid-1946 in Sibu with Sirat Haji Yaman as President and Awang Rambli as the Secretary General. The other Committee members were Wan Abu Bakar, Dayang Fauziah, Dayang Suri, Bujang Suntong, Wan Junaidi, Mohammad Moktar, and Mohd. Munir.<sup>62</sup> PPM was established with the aims of protesting against cession and of uniting all the natives against cession because they believed that the change was carried out in an under-hand manner without properly consulting the people. Hence it was considered invalid since Sarawak soil did not belong to Vyner Brooke and the British people. The PPM was, no doubt pro-Anthony Brooke and favoured the restoration of the Brooke Raj; but restoration was considered a temporary expedient as at the time they did not have a 'qualified' leader to lead them in the government. The traditional leaders were pro-cession.

PPM was a more radical organization than the MNUS. It emerged as a separate association which was dissatisfied with the Young Malay Association (YMA) Sibu, which supported cession. Those Sibu was led by Abang Abdul Rahim. Most of its Committee members were government servants who supported cession. Those members who disagreed with cession and who came from ordinary backgrounds and were not civil servants formed their association which was named PPM. Similar to MNUS in Kuching, its younger members often clashed with the conservative leadership and traditional members who adopted a cautious attitude towards political action, favouring delegations and negotiation within constitutional means. The younger group always wanted to take quick and direct action. The majority of this group then established the Thirteen Precepts (Rukun 13). In fact their actions were more daring than the 'Inner Circle' of the MNUS. This was because the Sibu Malay society not only lacked a strong traditional elite, but was also far away from the conservative influence of the leadership of the MNUS in Kuching. In addition the Malay-Muslims in Sibu (Third Division) had a tradition of opposing Brooke Rule in the 1850s to 1861. Thus when Haji Abdul Rahman of the MNUS tried to approach the PPM in order to strengthen the links between the two associations, he was rejected by many of PPM's members.

From the beginning PPM activities showed that it was much more inclined to take direct action in the name of the anti-cession cause. Its members also seem to have been more open to outside influences. Awang Rambli, its effective leader, was well-read. He



was born in Brunei and lived for some years in Kuching and attended English school up to Standard Three. He joined the Customs Department in July 1929 and either resigned or was dismissed in 1946. He became a member of the YMA in Sibu, but after leaving his job he became an active member of the PPM and was the chief leader of the Rukun Tiga Belas which organized the assassination of Duncan Stewart in December 1949. After being found guilty of conspiracy to murder, he was hanged on 23 March 1950 at the age of 38. The other members, Abang Han bin Abang Ahmad, who was the PPM's librarian, carried a copy of one of Karl Marx's works with him around the country when he accompanied Kathleen Brooke on her tour of the Third Division.<sup>63</sup> Abang Han was born in Sibu in 1925 and work for some years as an oil-tester in the Shell Oil Laboratories at Seria (Brunei). He joined Sarawak's jungle guerillas during the Japanese Occupation. He joined the Rukun Tiga Belas, was found guilty of conspiracy to murder Duncan Stewart and was sentenced to 15 years imprisonment.<sup>64</sup>

Although the name of PPM referred specifically to Malays, the membership was open to all natives in the Third Division, namely the Malays, Melanaus, Likaus, Dayaks and Kayan. But most of them were Malays, Melanaus and Ibans. PPM was considered a centre for the national movement in the Third Division to be launched through meetings, petitions, demonstrations and posters.<sup>65</sup> Like MNUS, PPM also had its own women's section (Kaum Ibu). The Kaum Ibu was chaired by Sharifah Sifah and its Secretary was Dayang Fauziah. The Kaum Ibu Sibu had close relations with Kaum Ibu Kuching and thus they were considered as two wings and could not be separated. Like Kaum Ibu Kuching, the Kaum Ibu Sibu was also active in participating in anti-cession demonstrations and speeches.<sup>66</sup> When the news of Anthony Brooke's return spread through the state, the PPM, together with other anti-cession associations, sent petitions to the Governor stating that they wanted Anthony Brooke to be Rajah of Sarawak. The PPM Committee members held a meeting on 14th November, 1946 to arrange for delegates to be sent to Kuching for Anthony's arrival and reception. As a liberal association PPM sometimes received petitions on behalf of other communities, such as Kayan from Belaga, and Ibans from Kapit and Song, saying that they protested against cession and wanted Tuan Muda or Rajah Muda as Rajah.

The members of the PPM had some contact with Dr. Burhanuddin, a Malay nationalist, in Singapore. Most of the Committee members of PPM were also well-read. They read *Utusan Melayu*, *Utusan Sarawak*, *Warta Ahad*, *Warta Jenaka*, and a few Indone-



sian journals. In fact its Secretary, Awang Rambli, often sent news of anti-cession activities, particularly PPM, to *Utusan Sarawak*. In one of his letters to *Utusan Sarawak*, Awang Rambli supported the publication of *Utusan Sarawak* on 16 January 1949. He composed a *syair* (verse-poem) in praise of *Utusan*.

Utusan Sarawak berfaedah besar  
 Dalamnya ada perkara suka dan gusar  
 Dapat diperhatikan gerak halus dan kasar  
 Dari gunung, hutan, kampung dan pasar.<sup>68</sup>

Having failed to accomplish their demands in Sarawak through petition-style letters and cables to the government, and noting the banning of Anthony Brooke from making a visit to Sarawak and Circular No. 9, the PPM decided to send their own representatives to Singapore to meet Anthony Brooke and Malcolm MacDonald. The PPM representatives, Abang Han and Haji Siraj Yaman, went together with MNUS and SDA delegates in order to convey their united opposition to cession on 19 February 1947. Their fares were paid by their own associations. Their first mission ended in failure. They could not achieve any solution. Hence Abang Han, together with Abang Kipli from YMA Sibu (who later was dismissed by Abang Abdul Rahim when he changed his attitude and began to favour cession), went again to see Anthony Brooke in Singapore in January 1948.<sup>69</sup> According to Abang Han, at this time he could see that Anthony Brooke was beginning to change his mind about seeking to maintain Brooke rule, and opposing cession, probably due to Malcolm MacDonald's influence.<sup>70</sup> Anthony Brooke was reluctant to cooperate with the PPM to sue Vyner Brooke on the basis of violation of his accession oath, by ceding Sarawak without consulting his heirs, Tuan Muda and Rajah Muda, and without full consent of the inhabitants. When Abang Han returned to Sibu he made a full report about the real situation regarding Anthony Brooke's attitude. At the same time in Kuching he found that the MNUS conservative section was beginning to lose ground and that the colonial government continued to ignore them in the belief that the movement would simply 'fade away' with time. The situation was one of frustration, perhaps even desperation, for there appeared to be no legitimate means to reverse the decision or a hope of changing British policy. The anti-cessionists had been resisting the change for three years without gaining anything essential.

Thus the unfavourable report regarding the Singapore mission and the discouraging situation in Kuching led the youth section of the PPM to think that they must take violent action. The justice they



had hoped from the British government had not materialized. Now they had to wait for the opportunity to take precise action and assassinate the Governor and other colonial officers, including native officers. Their intention was to show to the world that there was still opposition to the cession despite the report propagated by the Colonial government. Though this group was small in number, the members were men who would act because they could not put up with the situation any longer.

Awang Rambli, the Secretary of PPM and the leader of Rukun Tiga Belas, explained that as the government refused to take notice of posters and demonstrations, they had to take revolutionary action.<sup>71</sup> When one of the members Rosly, suggested that putting up posters was all that could be done, Rambli is said to have replied: "Putting up posters is a small affair, there is another way of acting. Fighting in the old way is of little importance, like waiting for golden rain to fall from the sky, but this is useless. We must remember that independence is in our own hands, we must dare to sacrifice somebody."<sup>72</sup> In addition they (the PPM youths) could not afford to be patient anymore for they were being frequently humiliated and illtreated by British officials and pro-cessionists. Humiliation and the attitude of the police officers, particularly that of Assistant Commissioner of Police R.W. Large, who was so harsh, rude and threatening, had created a feeling of hatred among the anti-cessionist towards the British officials. Some of them were tactless and harsh in their behaviour. In fact some contemporaries involved in events in Sibu compared Large to Fox and Steels who caused a 'Malay Plot' at Kanowit in 1859 by their brusqueness.<sup>73</sup> Similarly, the anti-cessionists were also humiliated by the pro-cessionists. They often teased the anti-cessionists as fighting for "Merdeka kambing" (Goat independence — an ineffectual independence). They also said that the anti-cessionists asked for independence, and yet "Jarum tidak boleh buat." (literally, they cannot even make needles). To the women anti-cessionists, the pro-cessionist chanted the words in the vernacular Malay, "Sampai tersengseng kain pun tak akan merdeka" (meaning - even when your sarong is lifted you will not attain independence).<sup>74</sup>

During the meeting which was called to find a solution for their frustration, Awang Rambli's suggestion to take violent action was not totally agreed to by other members in the PPM. Thus Awang Rambli went his own way. This resulted in Abang Han and Cikgu Arbi going away to work in Miri in January 1949. However, while they were away, Awang Rambli, Bujang Suntong and Morshidi held a different meeting together with younger members. They set up



a separate body which was known as Rukun Tiga Belas (Thirteen Precepts). The members were sworn to achieve two objectives. Firstly, they agreed to sacrifice themselves if the necessity arose, because they had been protesting in vain for three years to restore Sarawak's independence and to maintain something [Sarawak as a State] that was already legally in hand. Secondly, they decided to wait for the opportunity to take precise action and assassinate the British officials.<sup>75</sup> In their second secret meeting they decided to assassinate the second Governor who was about to visit Sibu in early December 1949. In his letter to *Utusan Sarawak* dated 14 October, 1949, Awang Rambli protested against the arrival of the second Governor, Duncan Stewart. He was supported by Johari Anang, General Secretary of the MNUS.<sup>76</sup> Awang Rambli's resentful feelings toward the new Governor intensified when he read speeches delivered in the Council Negeri by C. Dawson and the Governor which explained that there was no more anti-cession feeling in Sarawak.<sup>77</sup>

When the news of the Governor's visit was confirmed on 2nd December, 1949, once again the PPM Rukun Tiga Belas held a meeting on the evening before the governor arrived. Seven men attended the meeting. They were Rosli bin Dobi, the youngest member and a student of the Methodist School Sibu, Yusof Maraais, Morshidi, Wan Abu Bakar, Jamil Haji Idris, Mustapha Talip and Zen Abu.<sup>78</sup> Mustapha was willing to take the responsibility for the assassination attempt but Rosli insisted undertaking the attempt without involving the others. The group was hopeful that after the assassination the PPM would be able to continue with its struggle. The incident happened on the morning of 3rd December, 1949. Rosli and Morshidi were hiding among the school children lining up to honour and welcome the Governor's visit. When the Governor reached the shore from the launch, Rosli went forward and stabbed him.<sup>79</sup> The Governor died a week later on 10 December, 1949 in Singapore. After the incident, the plan was discovered by the Government officials when they found Abang Han's diary in which the name of those to be assassinated were written.<sup>80</sup>

The incident led to the PPM and all its branches being outlawed. Members were questioned and documents, including newspapers, magazines and school books were confiscated. The incident also terminated the effective political influence of all Malay organizations opposed to the colonial regime in Sarawak. The anti-cessionists were harassed and their homes being ransacked and documents confiscated.<sup>81</sup> In Sibu some of the Malay-Muslims had to run away away to the remote areas in order to avoid being caught by the



colonial government. C.W. Dawson believed that they ran away because they were afraid of the Ibans. Although Dawson was more tactful than other officials, sometimes his speeches and statements enraged the Malays, particularly towards the end of his service in Sarawak. He retired at the end of March 1950.<sup>82</sup> Of the conspirators involved, Rosli bin Dobi and Morshidi were hanged on 2 March 1950 while Awang Rambli and Bujang Suntong were hanged on 23 March 1950. The other seven accused were given long prison sentences. Since the men accused were not allowed to seek proper counsel and were defended by a government officer who had no legal training, the Sibu trial was understood to be a 'shabby and vindictive affair' by the anti-cessionists.<sup>83</sup> Abang Han was sentenced to 15 years imprisonment but this was later reduced to ten years because of good behavior. Che Osman Ahmad, Mornei Onei and Othman Dollah were sentenced to ten years imprisonment and Ahmad Haji Abu Bakar to seven years. Awang Osman and Wan Zain Abdullah were sentenced to five years imprisonment.<sup>84</sup>

The Colonial regime suppressed the anti-cession movement as well as individuals vigorously. The anti-cession movement, thus was unable to function actively and the meeting of its associations had to be suspended. However Sarawak national sentiment was kept alive quietly in their hearts until Ahmad Zaidie revived Barisan Pemuda Sarawak in 1958 for broad political purposes.

The assassination of Stewart inevitably strengthened Iban support for the Colonial regime. It was reported that Temenggong Koh, together with seven penghulus and a number of other Ibans in full war regalia, were present throughout the Sibu trial.<sup>85</sup> The Sibu incident, the increasing frustration of his own position, the dismissal of his appeal to the Privy Council,<sup>86</sup> and the situation in international politics in 1950-1951, all made Anthony Brooke announce his decision to abandon his six year struggle against cession in early 1951. He wrote an open letter in the *Sarawak Tribune* urging the natives to drop their struggle.

On behalf of the natives, the MNUS, SDA, BPS, Sarawak Nationalist Party and United Malay Association replied that they could not accede to his plan:

We regret we do not feel able to accede to your request to abandon these constitutional aims, but with this reservation we shall most willingly do everything within our power to play an active and constructive role in cooperation with Sarawak Government and all communities in the country. To this end we have already held consultations aimed at formation of a non-political association whose main object will be to support British Commonwealth ideals and to assist in safeguarding our peoples from subversive and foreign propagandist.<sup>87</sup>



The anti-cessionists supported Anthony Brooke as the potential fourth Rajah because they thought he would join them in their struggle. But when he failed to achieve his ambition to become the Rajah and the movement deteriorated to a certain extent to violence, Anthony did not want to commit himself further and withdrew from the scene. Instead he unsuccessfully appealed to the anti-cessionists to stop. In the view of the *Utusan Sarawak* in February 1951, "The struggle to revoke the cession was largely the struggle of the natives of Sarawak."<sup>88</sup> Thus when Anthony withdrew, the struggle passed largely in the hands of the natives though most of them were Malays, because the other indigenous people were largely uneducated and passive.

The anti-cessionist leaders had doubted Anthony's sincerity in the struggle since they went to see him in Singapore in 1947. In fact most of the younger members of the MNUS and PPM saw Anthony Brooke as a symbol of the whiteman's rule. However they found him useful in the anti-cession struggle, particularly in helping to win the support of the ordinary people. Their ultimate aim was that of achieving independence, a fact that was evident when they refused to listen to Anthony's advice. Thus the anti-cession movement was not the end but the means towards the achievement of complete independence.

The Sibul incident made it easier for the British Government to justify the suppression of the Malay opposition and indeed to treat all Malays as equally guilty although the assassination was done by a small group of them. As *Utusan Sarawak* put it, "The struggle of the PPM Rukun 13 has nothing to do with the struggle of the anti-cessionists as a whole. They condemned the act of violence which had been committed by the Rukun Tiga Belas as the Malay people had a fine record of service and loyalty to the Brookes."<sup>89</sup> The violence would not have happened if the British government took the anti-cession movement seriously and had been just and considerate in their dealing with the anti-cessionists' demands.<sup>90</sup> Although the majority of the people in Sarawak did not openly oppose cession, there was enough evidence to demonstrate that a strong group among the educated in Sarawak did not support cession. The British government should then at least not take any hasty decision or use harsh methods to crush the anti-cession movements. As mentioned earlier the younger group ('the Inner Circle') wished that the Brooke rule would continue for some time, during which Sarawak would be granted self-government and eventually independence as promised in the 1941 Constitution.



Unlike the anti-Malayan Union movement in Malaya, to which the majority of the Malays gave solid support, the Malays in Sarawak were not only divided but were also relatively small in number, i.e. about eighteen percent of the whole population of Sarawak at that time. Thus the Colonial Office saw no reason why it should take notice of them. In Sarawak the Colonial regime succeeded in dividing the local Malay aristocracy. Consequently the Malays neither created unity nor produced able leaders to organize the movement effectively. Instead the movement's recriminations were directed more against those Malays who were pro-cession than against the Colonial authorities. This contrasts sharply with the position in Malaya, where Dato' Onn in organizing the campaign against the Malayan Union encouraged the people to condemn the British Government plan rather than turn against the Malay Sultans.<sup>91</sup> In Sarawak the pro-cessionists with the full backing of the Colonial regime provoked the anti-cessionists with all sorts of insults and humiliations, as we have discussed in the section on the PPM above. While the anti-cessionists were busy arranging processions and demonstrations and plastering the kampongs with anti-cession posters, the pro-cessionists were busy enjoying the imprimatur of the colonial authorities and they fervently celebrated British royal weddings and births.<sup>92</sup>

In Malaya the Malays were solidly behind their rulers in protesting against the Malayan Union Scheme. In Sarawak, the Rajah himself made 'the first move' in suggesting cession without consulting the inhabitants of the country. Unlike in Malaya, there was no 'Big Business' factor in Sarawak. The situation was also different there in that there was no serious Communist activity in Sarawak in the late 1940s, as there was in Malaya, and no obvious threat of Chinese subversion. The Colonial government also encouraged investment in Sarawak after World War II. Finally, the anti-cessionist campaign was limited by a lack of mass-media for unlike the situation in Malaya, the movement was not well-equipped with newspapers until 1947 (when *Utusan Asas* was first published) to help arouse mass political consciousness. Furthermore, the literacy rate of the natives was low. Thus the native anti-cessionists had to depend on the contacts of the members, family and friends in order to extend their campaign.

In sum it could be said that although the anti-cessionists failed in achieving their objectives, the movement provided much political experience and supplied the basis of a nationalist tradition and the means of legitimizing the power of the educated elite who tried to preserve the Malay-Muslim ascendancy. Firstly,



although those who opposed cession remained politically passive after the assassination of Duncan Stewart, their nationalist feeling remained alive. In August 1958, led by the former President of BPS, the Malays in general were aroused again by a warning that they were being left behind by the non-natives in Sarawak. In the meeting to revive the BPS, the President, Ahmad Zaidie, said,

I am sick at heart to see the present conditions of our people...we are not contented with our present situation and that is why we undertake various movements to fight for our rights in our own land. I am sad because we are still asleep. I call you all to wake up...If you are afraid that your rice pot <sup>93</sup>be inverted, one day you will find yourselves imprisoned under a big cauldron.

Secondly, as a result of the major cleavage within the Malay community due to the dispute over cession, the political parties formed prior to the Federation of Malaysia in 1963, portrayed a 'cession' split. Those leaders who supported cession led by Datu Bandar and other YMA leaders (except Abang Ikhwan Zaini), formed Party Negara Sarawak (PANAS) on 9 April 1960. Most of the anti-cessionists, especially those in the BPS, established their own political party, Barisan Raayat Jati Sarawak (BARJASA) at the end of 1961 with the first four central executive men coming from former SDA members. Among the BARJASA founders were Abang Han, who became the party publicity chief and its executive secretary in 1963, Haji Suaut Tahir, Ajibah Abol and Aini bin Dhobi, Rosly Dobi's brother. The Chairman was Datu Tuanku Bujang, a former Native officer from Sibu and one of the active anti-cessionists.<sup>94</sup>

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Charles Brooke in the Council Negri, 1915, Brooke Papers, Box 11/2.

<sup>2</sup>J.M. Martin, "The future of the British Territories in Borneo" 14 February 1940, CO 531/29/17.

<sup>3</sup>S. Runciman, *The White Rajahs*, Cambridge, 1961, p. 261 and *The Facts about Sarawak*, p. 7.

<sup>4</sup>*News Review*, June 13, 1946 in Papers of E. Bank, Rhodes House Library, Oxford.

<sup>5</sup>SG June 1, 1937.

<sup>6</sup>*Sarawak Tribune*, March 1, 1946.

<sup>7</sup>Brooke Papers, Box 11/6.

<sup>8</sup>*Sarawak Tribune*, October 30, 1946, p. 6.

<sup>9</sup>Sanib Said and Fatimah Hj. A. Malik, "Anti-cession Movement, 1945-1951: The Birth of Nationalism in Sarawak." SG, April 30, 1976, p. 76.

<sup>10</sup>Suhaily Matlayeir to Anne Bryant, January 17, 1947, Brooke Papers, Box 11/1.



<sup>11</sup> Mohd. Nor to Anne Bryant, November 18, 1946, Box 11/1.

<sup>12</sup> Suhaily to Anne Bryant, loc. cit. and Reece and R.H.W. Reece, "The Cession of Sarawak to the British Crown, 1946". Ph.D thesis, ANU, 1977.

<sup>13</sup> Interview with Haji Johari Bojeng, July 25, 1979 in Kuching.

<sup>14</sup> In 1961 he became one of the founding members of the Barisan Anak Jati Sarawak Party (BARJASA) and acted as its publicity officer. He was also later a member of the Council Negri and a Member of Parliament. In 1978 he was made a Datuk by the State Government and in 1979 he was made a Tan Sri by the Federal Government.

<sup>15</sup> Interview with Haji Abdul Kadir Hassan, February 26, 1972 in Kuching.

<sup>16</sup> Interview with Haji Johari Bojeng, July 25, 1979, and Haji Kadir Hassan, February 26, 1972, in Kuching.

<sup>17</sup> Mohd. Nor to Anne Bryant, July 4, 1946, Box 12/14.

<sup>18</sup> Johari Anang to Anthony Brooke, October, 11, 1946, Box 22.

<sup>19</sup> Datu Patinggi was supposed to agree to support cession if his eldest grandson succeeded him and the title of Datu Patinggi was made hereditary.

<sup>20</sup> Interview with Hj. Johari Bojeng, July 25, 1979, and Hj. Kadir Hassan, February 26, 1972 in Kuching.

<sup>21</sup> Summary of comments received from Governor of Sarawak on aide memoire in relation to Sarawak Papers, prepared by direction of H.H. Rajah Brooke, Hussey Papers, Rhodes House Library.

<sup>22</sup> Malayan Security Service: Fortnightly Intelligence Journals 1946-1948, report for August 15, 1947 cited in Reece, "Cession", p. 384.

<sup>23</sup> Suhaily to Anne Bryant, January 17, 1947, Brooke Papers, Box 11/1.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> Mohd. Nor to Anne Bryant, February 12, 1947, Brooke Papers, Box 11/2.

<sup>29</sup> Sanib Said, "Anti-cession Movement 1946-1951: The birth of Nationalism in Sarawak", B.A. Exercise, University of Malaya, Kuala Lumpur, 1976, p. 30.

<sup>30</sup> Robert Jitam to Anne Bryant, May 23, 1947, Brooke Papers, Box 11/1.

<sup>31</sup> *Sarawak Tribune*, May 5, 1947.

<sup>32</sup> Mohd. Nor to Anne Bryant, July 16, 1947, Brooke Papers, Box 11/1.

<sup>33</sup> Interview (confidential) with one of the respondents in Kuching in July, 1979.

<sup>34</sup> Mohd. Nor to Anne Bryant, February 17, 1946, Box 11/2.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, June 16, 1947, Box 11/1.

<sup>36</sup> USNA was formed by the Sarawakians who worked in Singapore.

<sup>37</sup> *Sarawak Tribune*, July 3, 1947.



<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>39</sup> Kaum Ibu MNUS Kuching to Ranee Muda, April 24, 1947, Brooke Papers, Box 11/2.

<sup>40</sup> After resigning due to Circular 9/46, Ajibah taught at one of the Sekolah Raayat in Kuching. In 1960 she took Lily Eberwein's place as Chairman of Kaum Ibu. She became a member of the Supreme Council of BARJASA in 1961 and Vice-Chairman of Parti Bumiputra in 1967. In 1963 she was elected MP and when re-elected in 1974 she was appointed a Minister for Welfare Services of Sarawak. She died in 1976 and was awarded a posthumous datukship in 1977.

<sup>41</sup> Secretariat Circular No. 9/46 in *Sarawak Maju Sejak Merdeka*, Kuching, Sarawak, 1973, p. 8.

<sup>42</sup> Suhaily Matlayeir to Anne Bryant, January 17, 1947 Brooke Papers, Box 11/1.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, and Sharkawi Haji Othman to Anne Bryant, December 16, 1946, Brooke Papers, Box 11/1.

<sup>44</sup> MNUS to Crocker, December 21, 1946, Brooke Papers, Box 13/1.

<sup>45</sup> Hj. Suaut Tahir to Anne Bryant, January 11, 1947, Brooke Papers Box 11/1.

<sup>46</sup> Arden Clarke to Boyd, April, 6, 1948, Boyd Papers, cited in Reece, "Cession".

<sup>47</sup> Dawson's Diary, July 17, 1946.

<sup>48</sup> Johari Anang to Anthony Brooke, November 3, 1946, Brooke Papers, Box 22.

<sup>49</sup> Letter dated October 29, 1947, Brooke Papers, Box, 13/1.

<sup>50</sup> Mohd. Sirat President PPM to MNUS, November 15, 1946 Brooke Papers, Box 11/8.

<sup>51</sup> President MNUS Miri to General Secretary MNUS, November 15, 1946, Brooke Papers, Box 11/8.

<sup>52</sup> Mohd. Nor to Anne Bryant, March 21, 1947, Brooke Papers, Box 11/1 and Anthony Brooke to Anne Bryant, March 12, 1947, Box 11/1.

<sup>53</sup> Interview with Abang Han Abang Ahmad, July 20, 1979 in Kuching.

<sup>54</sup> Mohd. Nor to Anne Bryant, March 21, 1947, Brooke Papers, Box 11/1.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, April 2, 1946.

<sup>56</sup> *Sarawak Tribune*, April 3, 1946.

<sup>57</sup> Mohd. Nor to Anne Bryant, April 2, 1947, Brooke Papers, Box 11/1.

<sup>58</sup> Letter from Abang Kiprawi of Sibul and Abang Zainorin Native Officer of Bau Sarawak to Bertram Brooke, January 11, 1947, Brooke Papers, Box 11/2. This letter represented the feeling of the people of both Sibul and Bau.

<sup>59</sup> Interviews with Johari Bojeng, July 25, 1979 and Osman Zainuddin, November 23, 1973 in Kuching.

<sup>60</sup> Interviews with Lily Eberwein and Osman Zainuddin in November, 1973 in Kuching.



<sup>61</sup>Interview with Abang Haji Safuani, November 1973. The concerts were always held in his house compound in Kuching.

<sup>62</sup>*Utusan Sarawak*, October 9, 1949.

<sup>63</sup>Interview with Abang Han on July 28, 1979 in Kuching. See also Reece, "Cession" p. 261, typescript.

<sup>64</sup>Interview with Abang Han, July 28, 1979.

<sup>65</sup>*Utusan Sarawak*, October, 3, 1949.

<sup>66</sup>Interview with Dayang Fauziah, former Secretary of PPM women's section Sibu, July 30, 1979 in Sibu.

<sup>67</sup>Translation of letters received by Anthony Brooke in Brooke Papers, Box 12/14 and Box 11/8.

<sup>68</sup>*Utusan Sarawak*, October 17, 1949. The following is the English translation of the *syair*:

Utusan Sarawak, its benefits well-known  
Inside are matters both happy and sad  
Movements are observed both far and wide  
From mountain and forest, village and town.

<sup>69</sup>Interview with Abang Han, July 28, 1979.

<sup>70</sup>The relationship between Anthony Brooke and MacDonald could be seen in their correspondence in Brooke Papers, Box 2/5.

<sup>71</sup>Interview with Yusof Maarais, July 30, 1979 in Sibu.

<sup>72</sup>*Ibid.*, and Abang Han July 28, 1979 — R.W. Large, Police correspondence and memoranda Sarawak 1948-51 cited in Reece, "Cession" p. 272, typescript. *Utusan Asas*, April 1948, and *Utusan Sarawak* July 18, 1949 reported that Lord Listowel Secretary of State for Colonies when visiting Sarawak in 1948 said he came with open mind to see the situation in Sarawak. But when he was approached and invited to tea from the anti-cessionists section, he declined. Instead he accepted the Chinese community's invitation and attended their tea party. In his address to the party he said that all Chinese in Sarawak would be given equal status and rights as natives in Sarawak, though most of the Chinese were still loyal to China and celebrated the double tenth. Lord Listowel's attitude really hurt the anti-cessionists — *Utusan Sarawak* July 18, 1949 and October 24, 1949.

<sup>73</sup>Interview with Abang Han, July 28, 1979.

<sup>74</sup>Interview with Abang Han, Yusof Maraais and Dayang Fauziah in July, 1979.

<sup>75</sup>*Sarawak Tribune*, January 7, 1950.

<sup>76</sup>*Utusan Sarawak*, October 13, 1949.

<sup>77</sup>*Ibid.*, November 28, 1949.

<sup>78</sup>Interview with Yusof Maraais, July 30, 1979 in Sibu.

<sup>79</sup>*Sarawak Tribune*, December 5, 6, 7 and 9, 1949 and *Utusan Sarawak*, December 4, 1950, January 8, 1951, February 8, February 22, 1951.

<sup>80</sup>*Ibid.*, and interview with Yusof Maraais, July 1979.



<sup>81</sup> *Sarawak Tribune*, December 9, 1949 and interviews with Abang Han, Yusof Maraais, Dayang Fauziah, Haji Suaud, Abang Ikhwah Zaini, July, 1979 in Sibu in Kuching.

<sup>82</sup> *Utusan Sarawak*, 19 December 1949 and March 27, 1950.

<sup>83</sup> Reece, "Cession", p. 276 typescript.

<sup>84</sup> *Sarawak Tribune*, March 2, 1950.

<sup>85</sup> Cited in Reece, "Cession", p. 421.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 251 typescript. The first step was taken in July 1948 when a plaint was filed on Bertram's behalf in the Resident's Court at Brunei with the intention of recalling the line of succession as set out by James Brooke in his political will and Vyner's extraction of \$2,000,000 from the State funds in 1941. It was hoped eventually to petition the Crown to repeal the Order-in-Council of 26 June 1946 and to revive an account of the Rajah's transfer and the descendants of James Brooke's trustees on the grounds that this was beyond its jurisdiction and the decision was upheld by the Judge of Appeal in the state of Brunei, it was then possible to apply for special leave to appeal to the Privy Council. This was granted after long argument but on 30 March 1950 the judgement delivered by Lord Normand finally upheld the Brunei court's decision. Ironically enough the substantive question of the legality of cession was not discussed, most of the argument turning on the interpretation of the amended Courts Enactment 1908 of the State of Brunei and the Civil Procedure Code of the Federated Malay States. However, the judgement did determine that the original grant made to James Brooke by the Sultan of Brunei was a unilateral deed and that the Sultan did not retain any measure of authority over Sarawak. Besides, it added, "...the principles of international law or comity would exclude from the jurisdiction of the Courts of Brunei any question relating to the sovereignty or the land of Sarawak". The Law Reports (Appeal Cases)...Kuching 1950, pp. 313-27.

<sup>87</sup> *Sarawak Tribune*, February 8, 1951.

<sup>88</sup> *Utusan Sarawak*, February 22, 1951.

<sup>89</sup> For instance, Datu Patinggi Ali's sacrifice of his own life for the sake of James Brooke rule in the early Brooke rule and the service of the Malay datus throughout the Brooke reign.

<sup>90</sup> After the incident the MNUS, ASAS and BPS sent their condolences to the Governor's family. See *Utusan Sarawak*, December 19, 1949.

<sup>91</sup> A.J. Stockwell, *British Policy and Malay Politics during the Malayan Union Experiment 1945-1948*, MBRAS Monograph No. 8, 1979, pp. 70-71.

<sup>92</sup> M.B. Leigh, *The Rising Moon*, Sydney, 1974, p. 24.

<sup>93</sup> BPS General Meeting August 16, 1958, cited in Leigh, *Rising Moon*, p. 28.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*